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The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao, Chapter 5 Discussion Questions

1. Explain the quote before Chapter 5 begins: "Men are not indispensable. But Trujillo is irreplaceable. For Trujillo is not a man. His is...a cosmic force...Those who try to compare him to his ordinary contemporaries are mistaken. He belongs to...the category of those born to a special destiny." Focus on examples from the novel and the de Leon family.
2. Explain the quote, "One things you can count on in Santo Domingo. Not the lights, not the law. Sex. That never goes away." Use examples from novel and the de Leon family, not personal examples.
3. Explain the quote: "Every snake always thinks it's biting into a rat until the day it bites into a mongoose." Where have we seen the "Golden Mongoose" before? What does these images symbolize?
4. "She cried not for me or for herself but only for Oscar. Mi pobre, hijo, she sobbed. Mi pobre, hijo." Why does Beli show only love for Oscar and not Lola?
5. How does Lola better understand her mother now that she has been to the Dominican?
6. What does Lola mean when she says, "You can never run away. Not ever. The only way out is in? And I guess that's what these stories are all about."? What are these stories about?
7. How does the curse affect Lola in Santo Domingo?
8. Chapter 5 reverts to the narrator of Chapters 1, the one who footnotes. Is this Yunior or someone else? Use a quote from Chapter 5 and one from Yunior's Chapter 4 to support your answer.
9. Trujillo's Pakard is a major symbol here. What is it used for? What is it a symbol of?
10. Was Abelard Cabral's decision to hide his wife and daughter, to leave them at home, to not let them attend the party a wise one? Why or why not?
11. How is Abelard affected by fear of Trujillo? Show evidence from the novel.
12. How does the *fuku* unleash its curse upon the family in this chapter? Who dies, is killed, is tortured, is left for dead?
13. Chapter 5 is chronologically the first chapter in the book as it predates the others. Why does Diaz place it in Part II? What effect does this have on the reader's understanding of the de Leon family?
14. Chapter 5 continues the novel's "quest" narrative and it draws many allusions from Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Tolkien uses many archetypes (recurring symbolic characters in stories and mythology) that belong to darkness (e.g., Sauron, the Dark Lord of the Rings). Which characters belong to darkness in

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this chapter? What, therefore, is their role in Oscar and Lola's
quests?

15. Sauron, in the Lord of the Rings, destroys the land to feed
his power. How does Trujillo do the same?

16. Beli is an archetype. Once a "hidden princess" rescued by
a "matriarch," Beli is told a "revelation of Truth" that acts as a
"threshold" for the hero's choice of whether or not she will
accept the quest. What is this revelation of Truth? Does Beli
accept it? What, then, becomes of Beli's "Holy Grail," or ultimate
quest?

17. Plot Beli's heroic quest below:

A. Departure

1. **The Call to Adventure**The call to adventure is the point in a person's
life when they are first given notice that everything is going to change,
whether they know it or not.

2. **Refusal of the Call**Often when the call is given, the future hero
refuses to heed it. This may be from a sense of duty or obligation, fear,
insecurity, a sense of inadequacy, or any of a range of reasons that
work to hold the person in his or her current circumstances.

3. **Supernatural Aid**Once the hero has committed to the quest,
consciously or unconsciously, his or her guide and magical helper
appears, or becomes known.

4. **The Crossing of the First Threshold**This is the point where the
person actually crosses into the field of adventure, leaving the known
limits of his or her world and venturing into an unknown and dangerous
realm where the rules and limits are not known.

5. **The Belly of the Whale**The belly of the whale represents the final
separation from the hero's known world and self. It is sometimes
described as the person's lowest point, but it is actually the point when
the person is between or transitioning between worlds and selves. The

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separation has been made, or is being made, or being fully recognized between the old world and old self and the potential for a new world/self. The experiences that will shape the new world and self will begin shortly, or may be beginning with this experience which is often symbolized by something dark, unknown and frightening. By entering this stage, the person shows their willingness to undergo a metamorphosis, to die to him or herself.

B. Initiation

1. **The Road of Trials**The road of trials is a series of tests, tasks, or ordeals that the person must undergo to begin the transformation. Often the person fails one or more of these tests, which often occur in threes.
2. **The Meeting with the Goddess**The meeting with the goddess represents the point in the adventure when the person experiences a love that has the power and significance of the all-powerful, all encompassing, unconditional love that a fortunate infant may experience with his or her mother. It is also known as the "hieros gamos", or sacred marriage, the union of opposites, and may take place entirely within the person. In other words, the person begins to see him or herself in a non-dualistic way. This is a very important step in the process and is often represented by the person finding the other person that he or she loves most completely. Although Campbell symbolizes this step as a meeting with a goddess, unconditional love and /or self unification does not have to be represented by a woman.
3. **Woman as the Temptress**At one level, this step is about those temptations that may lead the hero to abandon or stray from his or her quest, which as with the Meeting with the Goddess does not necessarily have to be represented by a woman. For Campbell, however, this step is about the revulsion that the usually male hero may feel about his own fleshy/earthy nature, and the subsequent attachment or projection of that revulsion to women. Woman is a metaphor for the physical or material temptations of life, since the hero-knight was often tempted by lust from his spiritual journey.
4. **Atonement with the Father**In this step the person must confront and be initiated by whatever holds the ultimate power in his or her life. In many myths and stories this is the father, or a father figure who has life and death power. This is the center point of the journey. All the previous steps have been moving in to this place, all that follow will move out from it. Although this step is most frequently symbolized by

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an encounter with a male entity, it does not have to be a male; just someone or thing with incredible power. For the transformation to take place, the person as he or she has been must be "killed" so that the new self can come into being. Sometime this killing is literal, and the earthly journey for that character is either over or moves into a different realm.

5. **Apotheosis**To apotheosize is to deify. When someone dies a physical death, or dies to the self to live in spirit, he or she moves beyond the pairs of opposites to a state of divine knowledge, love, compassion and bliss. This is a god-like state; the person is in heaven and beyond all strife. A more mundane way of looking at this step is that it is a period of rest, peace and fulfillment before the hero begins the return.
6. **The Ultimate Boon**The ultimate boon is the achievement of the goal of the quest. It is what the person went on the journey to get. All the previous steps serve to prepare and purify the person for this step, since in many myths the boon is something transcendent like the elixir of life itself, or a plant that supplies immortality, or the holy grail.

C.

D. Return

1. **Refusal of the Return**So why, when all has been achieved, the ambrosia has been drunk, and we have conversed with the gods, why come back to normal life with all its cares and woes?
2. **The Magic Flight**Sometimes the hero must escape with the boon, if it is something that the gods have been jealously guarding. It can be just as adventurous and dangerous returning from the journey as it was to go on it.
3. **Rescue from Without**Just as the hero may need guides and assistants to set out on the quest, often times he or she must have powerful guides and rescuers to bring them back to everyday life, especially if the person has been wounded or weakened by the experience. Or perhaps the person doesn't realize that it is time to return, that they can return, or that others need their boon.
4. **The Crossing of the Return Threshold**The trick in returning is to retain the wisdom gained on the quest, to integrate that wisdom into a human life, and then maybe figure out how to share the wisdom with the rest of the world. This is usually extremely difficult.
5. **Master of the Two Worlds**In myth, this step is usually represented by a transcendental hero like Jesus or Buddha. For a human hero, it may mean achieving a balance between the material and spiritual. The person has become comfortable and competent in both the inner and outer worlds.
6. **Freedom to Live**Mastery leads to freedom from the fear of death, which in turn is the freedom to live. This is sometimes referred to as living in the moment, neither anticipating the future nor regretting the past.

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